Hardy and Women (8)
Sue's Words Spoken and Written

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1 Introduction

Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* (1896), unlike other new women in Hardy's novels, talks and writes on her own a lot about her educational background, her feelings, and her opinions on the relationship between man and woman. Almost all her words, spoken and written, are towards her cousin, Jude Fawley, and Mr. Phillotson, not towards the community she belongs to. In this sense her advocacy of a new relationship between man and woman is confined to a small sphere. There is a small chance of her acts and opinions spreading to the community through a friend of Mr. Phillotson, though. Therefore her high ideal is experimented with home and in family affairs. This may be one of author's aims in *Jude the Obscure*. That is to say, Sue Bridehead shows us one of the most ideal examples of new women in the Victorian Age. She does not pursue her economic independence, her social importance, or her position as an advocate who speaks for liberation of women. She just tries to put her ideal to practice in her family affairs. Sue indicates that education at a high standard can be obtained anywhere outside teacher-training colleges, that a woman with equal intellectual ability to men can exchange her opinions among men to an equal degree, and that a well-educated woman, even if self-educated, can avoid subjugated marriage.

The attainment of Sue's ideal needs Jude's support and Mr. Phillotson's generosity. Towards the realization of her ideal Sue tries to persuade Jude and Mr. Phillotson. When she sees Jude, she tells him her dream about the

relationship between man and woman. When she gets Phillotson's proposal of marriage, she tries to avoid a subjugated marriage with Mr. Phillotson. While she stays away from Jude, she openly writes her feelings from her inner soul to him because he is one of her relatives. After Jude's son, Little Father Time, died, she explains her evangelical idea about women's roles.

The aim of the present essay is to survey Sue's words spoken and written to both men, and to search for Sue's true intention she wants to obtain in her life.

2 New Women before Sue

New women in Hardy's novels do not explain their educational background by themselves. Bathsheba Everdene in *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) tells Gabriel Oak once, "I am better educated than you — and I don't love you a bit" (4, 66)[1], but she does not explain what she has studied, though she looks down on Gabriel Oak. Instead, when Mrs. Hurst, Bathsheba's aunt, talks sadly about Bathsheba's rude manner towards other persons, she refers to Bathsheba's education.

> "She is so good-looking, and an excellent scholar besides — she was going to be a governess once, you know, only she was too wild" (4, 63).

Mrs. Hurst regrets the loss of Bathsheba's chance of becoming a governess even though her niece is an excellent scholar. Her words indicate that Bathsheba has received a fair education in a big town, and that receiving education does not always change one's quality. The contents of education at teacher-training colleges are not referred to, but taken for granted here.

Eustacia Vye in *The Return of the Native* (1878) does not tell by herself anything at all about her education at teacher-training college in Budmouth. Rather, her education is referred to a few times in a descriptive part of the story. The first example appears in the introduction of Eustacia Vye as

Queen of Night.
Her father, a bandmaster of a regiment, sent her to school, but its expenses were paid by her grandfather.

> … the musician … took great trouble with his child's education, the expenses of which were defrayed by the grandfather, …. (I–7, 91)[2]

The second example in the same chapter shows what she read at school.

> Her high gods were William the Conqueror, Strafford, and Napoleon Buonaparte, as they had appeared in the Lady's History used at the establishment in which she was educated. …. At school she had used to side with the Philistines in several battles, …. (I–7, 93)

In the scene that Clym works as a furze-cutter, Eustacia gets greatly shocked at seeing Clym busily chopping away at the furze, singing songs merrily. At this moment the description part refers to her position which is not suitable to her background.

> … to hear him sing and not at all rebel against an occupation … was degrading to her, as an educated lady-wife …. (IV–2, 263)

The last example appears in the village festivity in which Eustacia decides to join and have an afternoon of reckless gaiety. When she realizes an unexpected absence of a local resident whom Eustacia knows, she hesitates to join the villagers.

> … were she to advance, cheerful dames would come forward … and make much of her as a stranger of superior grace and knowledge to themselves (IV–3, 269).

Though Eustacia does not explain her cultivation in words, she has self-respect as a highly educated lady, not as a wife of a village laborer.

In addition to these descriptive parts, Captain Vye, Eustacia's uncle, and

Clym Yeobright refer to Eustacia's culture. First, to Humphrey's question, Captain Vye grieves at the bad aspects of education. He says that "if Miss Eustacia … had less romantic nonsense in her head it would be better for her" (II−1, 129). Clym Yeobright tells his mother that Eustacia would make a good matron when his mother disagrees over his marriage with Eustacia. Clym says that "She is excellently educated, and would make a good matron in a boarding school" (III−3, 208). Thus Eustacia's culture is incidentally described and helps readers understand Eustacia's conditions in the scenes.

Grace Melbury in *The Woodlanders* (1887) is highly educated at a town and is refined above the level of an awkward yeoman, Giles Winterborne, to whom she is betrothed. Grace probably writes to her father about what she does at teacher-training college in town, but her activities at school are not described in the story. Moreover, while she does not tell anything about her education after she returns to her village, Hintock, George Melbury, her father, boastingly tells about her education to his laborers and his neighbors.

> 'I've kept my daughter so long at boarding-school … and her scholarship is such that she has stayed on as governess for a time' (4, 60)[3].

When Mr. Melbury asks Giles to meet Grace at Sherton Abbas, a nearby town, he supposes she carries awkwardness after her long stay at a fashionable town. Mr. Melbury assumes that "Coming from a fashionable school she might feel shocked at the homeliness of home" (4, 63). Mrs. Charmond admires Grace when she asks Grace to be her secretary, referring to Grace's culture.

> 'You are so accomplished, I hear; I should be quite honored by such intellectual company.'
> Grace, modestly blushing, deprecated any such idea (8, 90).

Mr. Melbury succeeds in getting Grace and Dr. Fitzpiers engaged and is satisfied with Grace's position as a medical doctor's wife. Mr. Melbury tells

himself:

> Grace had been so trained socially, and educated intellectually, as to see clearly enough a pleasure in the position of wife to such as a man as Fitzpiers (23, 186).

Although Grace does not express anything about her life at school, she takes in extensive views of people around her and her village from the viewpoint of a highly educated person.

3 Sue Bridehead

Unlike these new women mentioned above, Sue Bridehead makes an effort to carry out what she wishes for. With this in view she attempts to get agreement, support and sympathy of her cousin, Jude, and Mr. Phillotson. In various occasions and many scenes she tells her ideal in different ways, her suffering in her letters, and her culture acquired by herself. She says straightforwardly her drastic ideas. She says that "I am a sort of negation of [civilization]" (III−4, 167), that "(I am) the Ishmaelite" (III−2, 158), that "we have had enough of Jerusalem" (2−5, 128), and that "I hate Gothic" (III−2, 156). Sue's speeches and letters chiefly affect Jude throughout the story.

The most noticeable characteristic of this heroine is that she is a self-taught person, and that she tells her state of affairs to Jude by herself. She says that she gets acquainted with a Christminster student, lives together and goes on walking tours and reading tours like two men, and that she shares a sitting-room with him for fifteen months as she has refused to be his mistress. She also clearly states what she has read.

> "I don't know Latin and Greek, though I know the grammars of those tongues. But I know most of the Greek and Latin classics through translations, and other books too. I read Lemprière, Catullus, Martial, Juvenal, Lucian, Beaumont and Fletcher, Boccaccio, Scarron, De Brantôme, Sterne, De

> Foe, Smollett, Fielding, Shakespeare, the Bible and other such; and found that all interest in the unwholesome part of those books ended with its mystery" (III−4, 167)[4]

Her words explain that anybody is able to get enough knowledge if one reads these books even though one does not go to Christminster University. She asserts that "The medievalism of Christminster must go, be sloughed off, or Christminster itself will have to go" (III−4, 170). Sue mentions critical words against university and religion. She frankly uses offensive language about scholarly attainment and religious concepts, glancing into the pages of Solomon's Song.

> 'It seems the drollest thing to think of the four-and-twenty elders, or bishops, or whatever number they were, sitting long faces and writing down such stuff' (III−4, 171).

Sue does not aim to gain knowledge with which she can carry out her activities among the men's society. She insists that she cares "for something broader, truer" (III−4, 170). She recognizes that her experience with a university student corresponds to her ideal aspect of life in which she can freely exchange her opinions with intellectual persons such as "the most irreligious man … and the most moral" (III−4, 170) without a marriage bond. As she devotes herself to liberal ideas and paganism, she has an inordinate ambition, that is, 'to ennoble some man to high aims' (III−4, 172). Therefore Sue chooses Jude as such a man because he wants to be her comrade. He is a suitable person on whom she conducts an experiment of her ideal.

When Sue talks with Jude on an indifferent subject, there is "ever a second silent conversation passing between their emotions, so perfect is the reciprocity between them" (IV−1, 221).

> "Do you know any good readable edition of the uncanonical books of

> New Testament?"
> "Yes, there is one. …. The Gospel of Nicodemus is very nice. …. But, Jude, do you take an interest in those questions still? Are you getting up *Apologetica*?"
> "Yes. I am reading Divinity harder than ever." (IV−1, 220−1)

Sue's words make clear that she admires evangelism. Even though she is interested in pagan ideas, she is soaked in evangelical ideas. Hence around the end of the story she repeats the ideas as the role of a person who likes home duties and pleasures.

Sue always refrains from Jude's request for her love while they are talking intimately. She declares that

> "You mustn't love me. You are to like me" (III−5, 175)
> "I ought not to have been so intimate with you. It is all my fault" (III−5, 177)

She contradicts what people say about marriage.

> "I at least don't regard marriage as a Sacrament" (III−6, 185).
> "Their views of relations of man and woman are limited. …. Their philosophy only recognizes relations based on animal desire. The wide field of strong attachment where desire plays … is ignored by them" (III−6, 186)

Sue also deplores that her relationship with Mr. Phillotson is one of subjugation.

> "I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies …." (IV−1, 223)
> "What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally! …." (IV−2, 230)

Incited by the emulation of Jude's wife, Arabella, Sue agrees to get married with Jude, but she insists that passion's essence is gratuitousness.

> "Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation? Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?" (V−2, 286)

Although she is willing to think about her marriage with Jude, she resists her position which is restrained by law according to the idea generally accepted in Christian society. She fears that "an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you …" (V−1, 273). She wants to go on living always as lovers, and thinks that it is much sweeter for women. She abhors marriage both at church and at a registry office. Though Jude regards her as an ethereal creature, Sue is a domestic fighter for freedom at home and for equality between husband and wife at home. Therefore, seeing a marriage ceremony at church, she says:

> "Coming in here and seeing this has frightened me from a church wedding as much as the other did from a registry one …, and what others may feel confident in I feel doubts of — my being proof against the sordid coditions of a business contract again!" (V−4, 298)

Sue convinces that she has obtained Jude's agreement because he says that "domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness" (V−4, 299).

When Sue and Jude take over Jude's son, Little Father Time, she is very much pleased with Jude's idea which supports a sense of duty because his idea corresponds with her evangelical idea. She is able to play a generous person who brings up this poor boy and makes a good family with them. She pleasantly says

> "I feel myself getting intertwined with my kind …. I do want to be kind to this child, and to be a mother to him …." (V−3, 292)

She seems to grasp the meaning of being a woman and a mother for a child. Adding to the role of an intellectual woman who advocates an idea

that a woman should equally discuss philosophy and religion with a clever man, she takes on the challenge of the role of an intellectual mother. If she is able to carry out this role successfully for Jude's son, then she is to be a good example of an absolutely new type of woman. If she succeeds in this role, she can be a genuine woman in a new age, unlike other new women who claim equal rights to men. However, the people in the village criticize her sinful cohabitation and shut their door to her and her children. Therefore she confronts a breakdown in her scheme. Jude's son and her children are placed in a fix by Sue's obstinacy about a formal marriage and their death pierces her inner heart. She asserts:

> "I see marriage differently now. My babies have been taken from me to show me this! Arabella's child killing mine was a judgment — the right slaying the wrong" (VI–3, 358).

Criticism from village people does not penetrate Sue, who regards social common ideas as an absurdity woven by civilization, but the death of her children she cherishes is the most shocking disapproval of her life philosophy. Only the refusal of her family members makes her awake to her responsibility and to her wrong ideas. She reflects on herself:

> "I was in error — I cannot reason with you. I was wrong — proud in my own conceit! Arabella's coming was the finish" (VI–3, 360).

Taking over Jude's son might have been Sue's new start to prove that her ideal works well, that Sue and Jude are able to show a good example of a new family form, and that the joy of their family is virtue itself, but she realizes that her effort to be a new type of mother means the finish of her ideal. By this incident she recognizes her conceit is wrong. She moans:

> "I said it was Nature's intention, Nature's law and *raison d'etre* that we should be joyful in what instincts she afforded us — instincts which civilization had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has

> given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word!" (VI−2, 348)

The author of this story punishes his heroine, Sue Bridehead, in accordance with his own fatalism. He thinks that the Immanent Will of Universe works automatically like a somnambulist, and that human beings must submit its wrath. Accordingly Sue easily understands her situation and says mournfully:

> "We must conform! All the ancient wrath of the Power above us has been vented upon us, His poor creatures, and we must submit it. There is no choice. We must. It is no use fighting against God!" (VI−6, 351).

The words spoken by Sue show the limits of her idea for women's liberation in Victorian society. Even though Sue tries to demonstrate her ideal in a real life, her activities are refused by her neighbors. The role Sue has chosen as a new woman fails in the family setting, while other new women Sue criticizes continue to have a fight for women's liberation in their social activities.

After her disappointment, Sue repeats words such as "self-abnegation," "duty," "self-renunciation" (VI−3, 353−4), and "self-mastery" (VI−3, 360). She endures her feelings of displeasure that she must leave Jude. Her leaving Jude is "a matter of conscience" (VI−3, 362) with her. She says that she must ask for "mental communion" (VI−3, 360) between man and woman. She wishes "a humble heart, and a chastened mind" (VI−3, 353) and tries to have continual sacrifice on the altar of duty. She persuades herself to obey her duty as Richardson's wife even if she does not love her husband. This is her last destination.

> "I am going to make my conscience right on my duty to Richard — by doing a penance — the ultimate thing" (VI−9, 399).

The words spoken by Sue does not include words which so-called new women speak for economic independence, high positions in society, and

political rights because Sue does not claim her right in social activities. She wishes to have mental communion between man and woman. Her aim is to transform Jude into a man who can exchange thoughts, ideas and feelings with her. The role Sue takes on as a new woman is domestic and private, not public or social. As her words are one-sided, dogmatic, self-righteous, and often inconsistent, Jude doubts her true intention.

Sue's second letter to Jude from school at Melchester is rather private, avowed, and passionate. It is similar to a letter to one's mother or to one's sisters. In this case the narrator states what she writes to Jude:

> She was quite lonely and miserable, she told him. She hated the place she was in; it was worse than the ecclesiastical designer's; worse than anywhere. She felt utterly friendless; could he come immediately? (III−1, 150)

But after their meeting, Sue says that she is rather glad she belongs to a Training School after all, and she will be independent after two years' training! (III−1, 153) For Sue, speaking and writing about her hard situation to Jude means to relieve her feelings. When Sue goes to Jude for his help after escaping from school, she advises Jude not to love her even though she gets much hospitality from him. But Sue's letter which comes a few days later says:

> I felt what a cruel and ungrateful woman I was to say it, and it has reproached me ever since. *If you want to love me, Jude, you may*: I don't mind at all; and I'll never say again that you mustn't! (III−5, 175)

This kind of letter from Sue repeats Sue's superficial apology. Though she deprecates Jude's feelings of love, she writes an apologetic letter to Jude.

> Forgive me for my petulance yesterday! I was horrid to you; I know it, and I feel perfectly miserable at my horridness. It was so dear of you not to be angry! Jude, please still keep me as your friend and associate, with all my faults. I'll try to be like it again (III−5, 178).

Two astonishing letters from Sue tell her engagement and marriage with Mr. Phillotson. In her first letter she writes to Jude to "wish me joy," and to "remember I say you are to, and you mustn't refuse" (III−6, 188). Her second letter shows that Sue regards Jude as one of her relatives. This letter shows the core of her concept of her relation with Jude.

> Jude, will you give me away? I have nobody else who could do it so conveniently as you, being the only married relation I have here on the spot …. (III−6, 189)

Sue's basic attitude towards Jude depends on her concept that Jude is a member of her relatives, and that he is her cousin who should be kind enough to understand and support her. Therefore she presumes on his kindness when she writes, but she dogmatically tells her ideal to him and is rigid in her idea on marriage with him when she meets him in person. After their agonized meeting, she writes to him with sweet humility:

> She felt she had been horrid in telling him he was not to come to see her; that she despised herself for having been so conventional; and that he was to be sure to come by the eleven-forty-five train that very Sunday, and have dinner with them at half-past one. (III−10, 213)

In her letter she also shows her one-sided plan about their meeting appointing the day and the time by herself. The similar example appears when she leaves Mr. Phillotson. She writes to Jude to meet her on the Melchester platform.

> I feel rather frightened, and therefore ask you to be sure you are on the Melchester platform to meet me. I arrive at a little to seven. I know you will, of course, dear Jude. (IV−5, 252)

Sue does not consider Jude's inconvenience. She writes to Jude according to her own convenience. This kind of attitude brings unsolvable problems to

her.

On the other hand, Sue writes many "straightforward, frank letter" (III−6, 180) to Mr. Phillotson. In one of her letters to him she writes that

> it was honorable and generous of him to say he would not come to see her oftener than she desired (the school being such an awkward place for callers, and because of her strong wish that her engagement to him should not be known, which it would infallibly be if he visited her often). (III−6, 180)

Even though Mr. Phillotson is Sue's betrothed, Sue treats him as an unrelated person. As she does not love him at all, her words in her letter to him are unfriendly, and show her periphrastic expression, unlike her passionate letters to Jude.

The strange exchange of notes between Sue and Mr. Phillotson, while they have class at Phillotson's school, results in one decision that they live separately in his house. They do not discuss this crucial problem in person, but express their opinions in notes. Moreover, Sue expresses her wish according to her own convenience. She does not consider Mr. Phillotson's feelings. She aims at escaping from her abhorrence to her husband and she will be satisfied by getting freedom from him. Her selfishness is described in her note.

> "If you won't let me go to him, will you grant me this one request — allow me to live in your house in a separate way?" (IV−3, 241)

4 Conclusion

Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure* takes a supporting part in the story, but she has a strong effect on Jude and charms him to be an object of her experiment to prove the truth of her ideal for life. For that reason much space in the story is set apart for the conversation between Sue and

Jude. Sue speaks a lot about her ideas, feelings, and opinions about social conventions and religious questions. Especially she speaks about the ways of treating and thinking of the relation between man and woman. She learns about liberal ideas and paganism from various books. Consequently her words are doctrinaire, philosophical and masculine. She decides that her ideal is the best one, that Jude should follow her ideal, and that she should always be independent. Her words are one-sided, dogmatic, and self-righteous. To persuade Jude she uses many impulsive words and takes some actions without thinking about their suitability. Her words spoken and written are often contradicted, and have a hard time conveying her true intentions to Jude, who thinks that Sue has a "curious double nature" (IV–2, 226). Besides, her words are emotional, full of her abhorrence of restraint and compulsion. They indicate that she loves liberalism as her basic conception. Her words, however, follow evangelical teachings. When Sue and Jude take over Little Father Time, Sue is very much pleased with Jude's idea that "all the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care" (V–3, 288). And then she stresses the importance of evangelical teachings after their children's death. Sue is a highly intelligent new woman who longs for freedom at home beyond the modern Christian-centered world, and longs for mental communion between man and woman, but her experiment fails in a Victorian society because of the contradictions in her words and actions. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy describes an advanced, but inconsistent, new woman who struggles for a new way of life.

Notes

I am very grateful to Mr. William Kumai, my colleague, for his helpful comments on my English, but the responsibility for all mistakes in this essay remains my own.

1 Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*, The New Wessex Edition (Macmillan, 1975). The two passages cited are taken from this edition, and numbers in the pa-

rentheses indicate the chapter and pages.

2 Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native*, The New Wessex Edition (Macmillan, 1975). The six passages cited are taken from this edition, and numbers in the parentheses indicate the book, the chapter and pages.

3 Thomas Hardy, *The Woodlanders*, The New Wessex Edition (Macmillan, 1975). The four passages cited are taken from this edition, and numbers in the parentheses indicate the chapter and pages.

4 Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*, The New Wessex Edition (Macmillan, 1975). All the passages cited are taken from this edition, and numbers in the parentheses indicate the book, the chapter and pages.

References

1 Jenni Calder, *Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction* (Oxford, 1976).

2 Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (Macmillan, 1978).

3 Penny Boumelha, *Thomas Hardy and Women, Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

4 Rosemarie Morgan, *Woman and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy* (Routledge, Chapman, 1988).